

# THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 20 Iss 19 2012-05-18

## Through Many Windows

*Sidewalls*

## Word Wars

That takes the cake

## Allergy Attack

Natural remedies

*Plus:*

*From Where I Sit  
Cruiscin Lan  
and much more!*



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[www.voicemagazine.org](http://www.voicemagazine.org)

500 Energy Square  
10109 – 106 ST NW  
Edmonton AB  
T5J 3L7

800.788.9041 ext. 2905

Email  
[voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org)

**Publisher**

AU Students' Union

**Editor-In-Chief**

Tamra Ross

**Managing Editor**

Christina M. Frey

**Regular Contributors**

Hazel Anaka  
Katie D'Souza  
S.D. Livingston  
Wanda Waterman

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org), and please indicate if we may publish your letter.



## THIS WORLD

Wanda Waterman



Graffiti scrawled on the sides of buildings is a potent reminder of Tunisia's recent social upheavals.

## Tunisian Travels, Part II

Recently Wanda Waterman spent several weeks in Tunisia, where she crossed half the country, visited several cities and villages, and stayed with a traditional Tunisian family. This travelogue series chronicles her adventures and experiences in the Maghreb. Read the first part of the series [here](#).

## Fears and Trepidations

Gafsa, where my hosts live, is the subject of a warning in this travel advisory from the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs: “Canadians should carefully plan any travel in the southern regions of Tunisia, especially

along the Libyan and Algerian borders, as regional tensions increase the risk of terrorism or exposure to other disturbances. Social tensions are reported especially in the Gafsa and Sidi Bouzid regions.”

Is Gafsa dangerous? Perhaps my view is too rosy—after all, I’m the guest of a Tunisian family that is taking great pains to shield me from the uncertainties of the tourist’s journey—but I can’t say I’ve felt safer anywhere. To me, it feels as though a day of social unrest in Gafsa is still less perilous than an average day in any large American city.

## Writing on the Wall

And the social unrest is now focussed and deliberate. The Jasmine Revolution echoes in graffiti that proclaims *Degage* (“Get out of here,” the word aimed like an Uzi at the head of former dictator Ben Ali). Beside it in Arabic is the name of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Sidi Bouzid vegetable vendor who died in December 2010 as a result of burns sustained after he set himself alight to protest humiliating actions taken against him by police. His death was the catalyst for the weeks of intense countrywide protests that eventually succeeded in driving Ben Ali and much of his family from the country in January 2011.

Now, though, there’s the sense that it’s time to buckle down. Tunisia is experiencing the growing pains of uncertain change coupled with a general determination to build a just society. The politically engaged, especially the youth, are optimistic and savvy, and I have an excellent discussion, for example, with a young man about the necessity of good labour laws.

But the yearning for justice sometimes conflicts with years of habituation to the kind of survival mode economics that rationalize dishonesty in business relations. I see this on a small scale in the markets, where the vendors stand at the openings of their kiosks and implore, *Madam, achetez!* but hang their heads when they see that I'm in the company of Arabs. Stronger than the Arab merchant's wish to profit from Western tourists is the Arab host's determination that his guests will not be cheated.

### A Kinder, Gentler Social Reform

There are daily demonstrations, but none erupt into violence and some can even be hard to spot. One day we're walking through a small park in Gafsa, and we see one man masterfully strumming an *oud* and singing while another plays a *derbouka*. A polite and attentive audience surrounds them. Afterward my friend informs me that we've just walked through a labour demonstration. I hadn't even noticed.

There's some cause to be anxious, but among the citizenry the fear of the police is greater than that of the rioting mob. For example, in the capital I ask to photograph the huge coils of barbed wire surrounding the government buildings and am soundly lectured. Yes, a crowd can become rowdy, but they're usually unarmed; the police are not only armed, but also have a tendency to be a bit—well—knee-jerk in their reactions.

The vigilance is still palpable. In a café I overhear a man talking on his cell phone, saying that there's a female Canadian journalist in town taking photographs. I'd love to know if the receiver interprets this as good news or bad.

### Seven Days of Feasting and Fun

Despite all the uncertainty, community life continues to roll along with traditions as ancient as quartz, seemingly untouched by the vicissitudes of political change.

One of the most important events in Tunisian life is the wedding, a major event calling for months of preparation and a huge chunk of change. The traditional wedding takes seven days, the first three days being a henna party during which the bride and any other women who wish it get henna stained onto their hands and feet as well as temporary ink tattoos.

We enter a large house to *mezwed* music played to a driving beat. It's a large courtyard with black and white tiles and a starry sky for a ceiling. Our party of women is ushered into a little room, where we're offered couscous, *makrouts* (a regional delicacy—a cookie flavoured with orange blossom water), and soda.

*"The silent onlookers, those whose only concern is to protect their political or economic interests, will be left with their shame. Whether the uprising ends in success or failure, its principles—resistance to the dictatorship and exposing its supporters (dictators, democrats and/or hypocrites)—will not disappear."*

Tunisian poet Tariq Ramadan

Afterward we go to sit on molded plastic chairs near the dance floor. The men remain chatting at tables outside the house or just inside the doorway. Only women are dancing. The women range in age from four years old to eighty, all actively engaged in the most sensual dance I've ever seen, raising their twirling hands in the air and freely swinging their hips to the driving rhythm. I'd thought of this as a relatively prudish society, having forgotten how one society is prudish where another is uninhibited. Eventually they drag me up to the floor and there I am, dancing like a white girl among the swaying odalisques. I've never felt more like Miss Jane Hathaway.



One of the many open-air bazaars lining the streets.

The most glorious of them all is a hefty elderly woman swathed from head to toe in traditional Arab vestments. Her hands held high, her smiling face lifted to the sky, she freely moves her hips in an exultant affirmation of life. Later at home I demonstrate her dance for my hosts, and from then on every time someone visits the house they insist, *Show them how the grandmother danced!* And laugh uproariously when I comply.

*(To be continued.)*

Wanda also penned the poems for the artist book *They Tell My Tale to Children Now to Help Them to be Good*, a collection of meditations on fairy tales, illustrated by artist Susan Malmstrom.

## GREEN LIGHT

## Sun Screen

Summer's fast approaching, which means it's time to look out for your skin. Protecting yourself from harmful UV rays is essential to good skin health, but many sunscreens on the market contain toxic chemicals that are damaging both to your health and to that of the planet.

Fortunately, there's an easy way to determine the safety of the sunscreen you've got in your cupboard. Advocacy organization Environmental Working Group (EWG) has just published its annual [Sunscreens Guide](#), and it's easy to use; just run a traditional search or scroll through brands and types. There are ratings for 1,800 sunscreens and SPF lip balms, moisturizers, and makeup.

You can also read their [report](#) to find more detailed information on their findings, and (for a small donation) download a summary to take with you when you go sunscreen shopping.

If all the information seems overwhelming, take it slow: this [summary article](#) is an excellent start.

## HEALTH MATTERS

Katie D'Souza

**It's Allergy Season!**

*This article originally appeared in volume 1917 of The Voice Magazine (May 6, 2011).*

April showers bring May flowers, but May flowers unfortunately can bring those dreaded seasonal allergies. How to cope? In this article we'll explore why allergies occur, and investigate some natural options for relief.

**What Are Allergies?**

A healthy immune system is always in a state of vigilance, distinguishing the harmful substances from the benign. It's when this state of vigilance goes awry and turns hyperactive that allergies develop. Immune hyperactivity causes the body to react to substances like pollen or dander by producing antibodies—and creating more for the future.

These stored antibodies bind to the surfaces of cells called mast cells. Then they live in “waiting” mode until the body re-encounters the original allergen. That's when the mast cells do their job and release certain chemical compounds like histamine, causing the familiar allergy “symptoms”: itchy eyes, runny nose, and more.

**What Can I Do?**

Fortunately for allergy sufferers, there are some natural options that may offer some relief.

*Nutrition:* First, check your eating habits. Consuming antioxidant-rich foods like blueberries can reduce allergy symptoms, but sufficient quantities are necessary for this effect. The average adult should consume up to one pint of mixed berries per day to generate results.

*Probiotics:* Probiotics—friendly bacteria harboured in your gut—are necessary for health, contributing to good digestion and assimilation and manufacture of nutrients (for more on probiotics, check out the *Voice* article series, [Part I](#) and [Part II](#)). Because probiotics also keep your immune system in balance, a lack of these so-called gut flora can play a role in allergy predisposition. For example, infants without adequate gut probiotics develop allergies more readily than those with normal probiotic levels and species. Supplementing your probiotic levels can be done easily over the counter, but one caution: to be effective, a probiotic should have a minimum of two billion cells, be refrigerated, and include probiotic strains like *L. acidophilus*.

*Quercetin:* Quercetin is a flavonoid, a naturally-occurring biochemical compound found in fruit peels and eucalyptus leaves, and it can help reduce allergic symptoms in some adults. How does it work? Quercetin modulates the histamine response from mast cells, meaning that your reaction to an allergen will be less dramatic. As a result, you will have fewer symptoms.

*De-Stress:* With our fast-paced lives, it's hard to stay in a relaxed, stress-free state. However, because stress affects the immune system, it can worsen allergy symptoms. You may have many commitments, but can you approach these projects in a more relaxed manner? Note your shoulders. Are they tensed and raised toward your ears? (Relax them!).

When you come in contact with a known stressor, pay attention to your body's reaction. Try pausing and breathing deeply for two minutes. Harvard Medical School's Mind-Body team has found that it takes at least this amount of time before the brain's predominant waves change to the more relaxed alpha waves. Some stress is inevitable, but learning to handle it well may be integral in helping you keep your allergies under control.

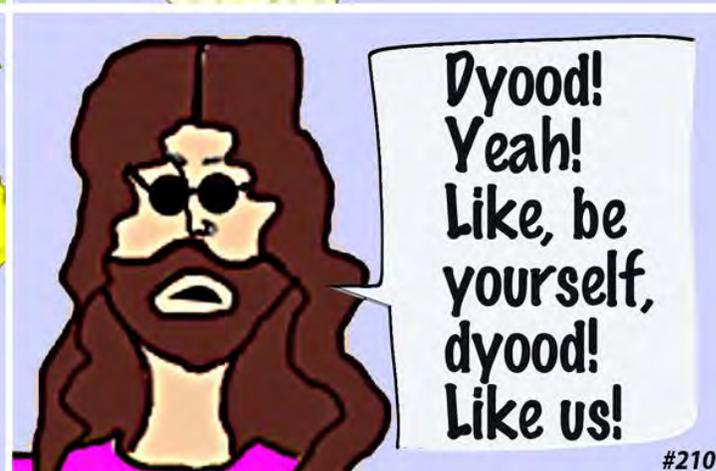
Although allergy season may be in full swing, with some knowledge and natural tools you might not have to suffer as much this year!

*Katie D'Souza is an AU graduate and a licensed naturopathic doctor. She currently practices in Ontario.*

*Disclaimer: The information contained in this article is for personal interest only; it is not intended for diagnosis or treatment of any condition. Readers are always encouraged to seek the professional advice of a licensed physician or qualified health care practitioner for personal health or medical conditions.*

## CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman





## A Peek at My Week

Another incredibly busy week awaits. It's late Monday as I write this, and I'm just back from Edmonton—my third trip in the last five days. Here's a peek at what's in store.

**Monday:** Today's trip was part business, part pleasure. The business meeting was with a young mother who is considering hiring me to plan her son's first birthday. What's the big deal, you ask? A room at a country club, 100 guests, a catered meal at \$25 a person, a professional photographer, and an entertainer make this one special party. This ain't no Duncan Hines cake, hot dogs, and Pin the Tail on the Donkey affair. Before I can put together a quote I want to see the venue and determine the scope of my involvement. We don't want to duplicate each other's efforts or drop the ball like two outfielders who each think the other one's got it. This young lady is very hands-on. I should know; I officiated at her wedding three years ago.

Next stop was the Apple store to pick up my new Mac desktop. At \$2,000, the decision was a big one. I'm going to use every bit of the next two weeks to make sure it works in my setting, ergonomically speaking.

**Tuesday:** Tomorrow will be spent setting up the Mac, working on last minute details for an event I'm coordinating, and gathering up treasures for our multi-family garage sale this weekend. The evening will be spent chairing a library board meeting. As the new chair I've had to work like a fool to get processes in place and

get us back on track. Part of the recent frustration in the group has been our inability to make these damn decisions in the first place. I intend to change that.

**Wednesday:** By today I should have the 2,500 brochures and 7,500 stickers that need to be stuffed into event packages. Rather, I'd *better* have them, because Thursday is distribution day. I'll also be spending time preparing for the weekend's garage sale. At least some of that was done ahead of time; last weekend I forced Hilary to sort through the boxes and bins of her stuff that have been stored here since she left home nine years ago.

**Thursday:** I will need to drive to Lamont and try to distribute supply packages to participating volunteers. Because many of them are elderly, I need to draw attention to the changes this year and ensure they know what to do. I need to be enthusiastic, positive, and grateful. That's not hard to do.

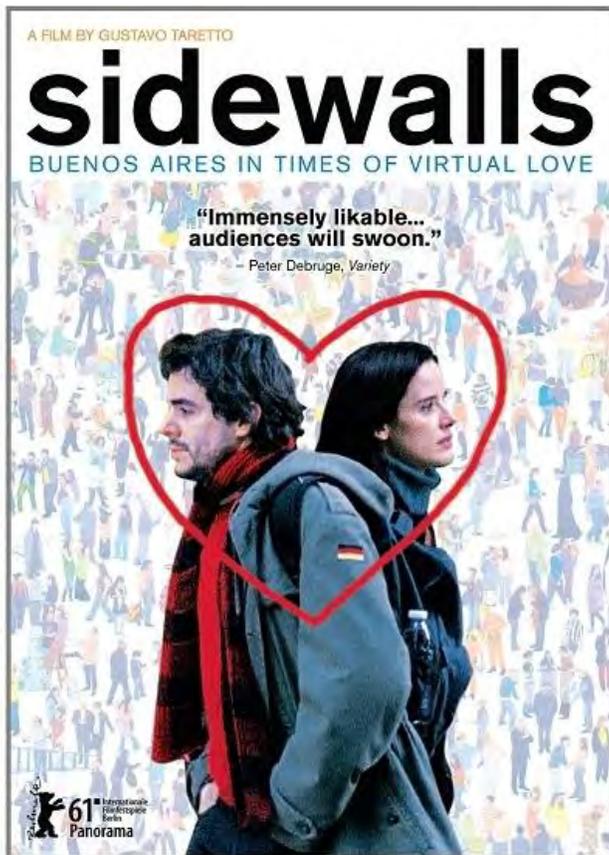
**Friday:** After making a mad dash into the city, I'll head back to sell, sell, sell. We hope for good weather so we can capture the heading-to-the-lake crowd that will pass through town.

Through all this I will be on-call in case Roy needs me while he plants the crop. The scary part? Next week doesn't look much better, from where I sit.

Hazel Anaka's first novel is *Lucky Dog*. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.

## THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



### Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

**Film:** *Sidewalls* (IFC Films)

**Screenwriter/Director:** Gustavo Taretto

**Cast:** Pilar López de Ayala, Javier Drolas, Inés Efron, Carla Peterson, Rafa Ferro, Adrian Navarro

**Genre:** Drama/Art House

*“Suppose further,’ Socrates says, ‘that the man was compelled to look at the fire: wouldn’t he be struck blind and try to turn his gaze back toward the shadows, as toward what he can see clearly and hold to be real?’”*

Plato’s *Republic*

#### Finding Waldo

Many of the windowless sides of the high rises in Buenos Aires exhibit tiny windows in odd places. Mariana and

Martin, strangers to each other, both notice the phenomenon and realize that tenants are having windows discreetly cut out of their little shoebox apartments to let the light in. They do likewise, hiring carpenters to carve square holes into their walls and make them into real windows. On the exterior these show up in weird places—at the end of an arrow, for example, or as the eye in a picture of a face—and serve as potent symbols for getting out of the box.

The decision to make windows at the same time is not really due to karma or fate. When we find our soulmates it’s not just because some invisible yet powerful and transcendent force has manipulated our paths so that they cross each other at just the right moment; it’s also because we make a conscious decision to grow up and lay aside the fears, delusions, and petty addictions that have sprouted up to form the thick hedges that stand between ourselves and the terrifying blessedness of reality.

We’re introduced to this reality by means of a little tour of the buildings of Buenos Aires, the typical modern city on a plate. Architecture and technology and even all things manmade are examined as metaphors for the divided nature of postmodern humanity—we are divided from ourselves and within ourselves. Our world of connectivity draws us together while making real relationships nearly impossible.

Martin and Mariana have reacted to this alienation by developing phobias: Martin fears open spaces and Mariana, heights and crowds.

Because of this fear of crowds Mariana is fascinated by the *Where's Waldo* books. Searching for that red and white striped sweater in those packed public spaces is as thrilling for her as ghost stories around a midnight campfire.

In spite of their emotional and psychological problems Martin and Mariana retain an existential dignity that places them on a path of redemption; they will not accept things as they are, and keep looking for a way out. When the same old ways don't work they begin to jettison the useless baggage of their lives in the hope that their ship might sail a little faster toward release from the pseudo-reality that traps them.

Frightened of the red pill, they're still not content with the blue pill, and attempts to live within their own personal matrices just keep breaking their hearts.

I'm a little puzzled by the critics who didn't seem to get the subtleties of this well crafted, well acted, and vibrantly directed piece and dismissed it as just another saga of postmodern alienation and Internet romance. Even the *Where's Waldo* motif is dissed as a gimmick when in fact it's a brilliant metaphor for the threat of loss of the true self.

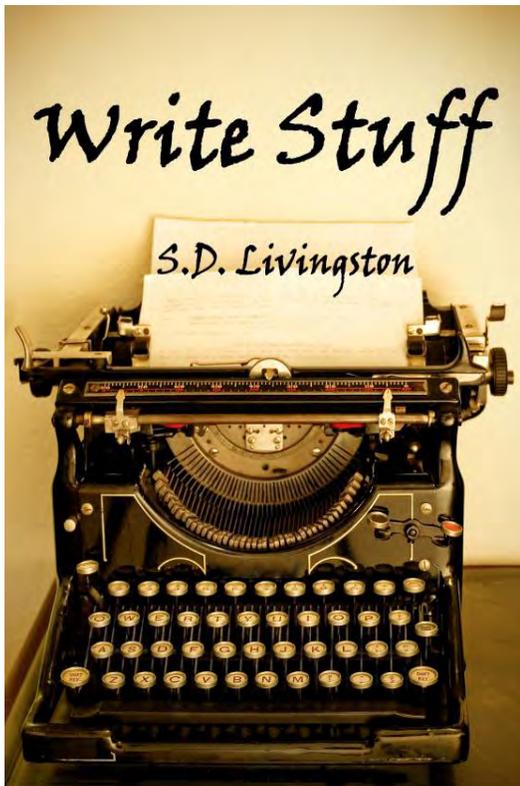
*"When we find our soulmates it's not just because some invisible yet powerful and transcendent force has manipulated our paths so that they cross each other at just the right moment; it's also because we make a conscious decision to grow up and lay aside the fears, delusions, and petty addictions that have sprouted up to form the thick hedges that stand between ourselves and the terrifying blessedness of reality."*

*Sidewalls* is a deeply cynical film with a surprisingly lighthearted and optimistic ending, and in between is a kind of roadmap to wholeness.

*Sidewalls* fulfills eight of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 3) it stimulates my mind; 4) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 5) it is about attainment of the true self; 6) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 7) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; and 8) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

*"I'm convinced that separations, divorces, domestic violence, the excess of cable TV stations, the lack of communication, listlessness, apathy, depression, suicide, neuroses, panic attacks, obesity, tenseness, insecurity, hypochondria, stress, and a sedentary lifestyle are attributable to architects and builders."*

**Sidewalls**



## Word Fury

Congratulations. You have just been named King (or Queen) of the English Language. It's not all glitz and glamour, but the job does have an interesting perk: you get to choose the one word you will banish from the language forever. The word you love to hate, the one that makes you cringe every time you hear someone use (or misuse) it. But will it really be that easy to decide?

People can be surprisingly fervent about the words they dislike (like *fervent*, perhaps). Throw the topic into a conversation and you'll see what I mean—you might end up feeling as though you'd poked a hornet's nest. In fact, according to this Visual Thesaurus [post](#), there's even a Facebook group called "I HATE the word MOIST!"

Why all the word fury? Well, it might be because we have no control over the words we hear. We can choose not to eat the foods we dislike, and we can refuse to put on uncomfortable clothes, but we can't simply tune out the words other people use. Sure, we've all struggled through a dismal main course at a dinner party, but that's usually over in an hour or two (and we can always avoid the Brussels sprouts lasagna by claiming we've got an allergy).

Words, on the other hand, surround us all day, every day, both spoken and written. And we have absolutely no way to stop the constant flow of terms like *orifice* and *irregardless* that streams from other people's mouths.

Often, our pet word peeves have little to do with the meaning of the word itself. Take *cake*, for instance. For most people it's a pleasant word, bringing forth images of frothy yellow and white concoctions. But for one commenter in that Visual Thesaurus post, the word *cake* should be banned because of the way it sounds—the way it gets "all bunched up in the back of the throat."

Another disliked word? *Slacks*. It's tempting to think that hard vowel sounds, like the "k" in *cake* and *slacks*, have something to do with it, and that soft vowels and consonants are more pleasing. But that doesn't explain why the word *meal* rates surprisingly high in disfavor. Which makes me wonder how that Facebook group might feel about the phrase "moist meal."

For sheer popularity (of an infamous quality) though, the most hated word has got to be *like*. The poor little thing has been tossed about so carelessly, appearing so often in the strangest of places, that it seems to have lost its original positive meaning.

Still, *like* has its defenders, and a very interesting history that explains its migration into Valleyspeak. As this *ABC News* clip [explains](#), *like*'s annoying prevalence started with Jack Kerouac, got a boost in the San Fernando Valley in the 1960s, and still survives thanks to shows like *The Hills*.

Far more than just an annoying quirk of speech, *like* pulls some pretty heavy linguistic weight, taking on roles such as “quotative complementizer” and “approximative adverb.” Not bad for a four letter word.

So what's your favourite word to hate? *Pulchritude*, perhaps? Or *literally*? Go ahead, ban it forever. And if your subjects insist on using it, well, you can always let them eat cake.

*S.D. Livingston* is the author of several books, including the new suspense novel *Kings of Providence*. Visit her [website](#) for information on her writing (and for more musings on the literary world!).

## CLICK OF THE WRIST

## International Museum Day

**May 18 is International Museum Day. But if you've got other plans, don't despair—an increasing number of museums, galleries, and other organizations are creating detailed online exhibits, and you can browse them anytime, anywhere. Check out these links and experience museums from the Smithsonian in Washington, DC to the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar.**

### Google Art Project

Want to broaden your artistic awareness? Visit Google Art Project, which has worked with museums around the world to provide access to art pieces as well as historical artifacts, photographs, and manuscripts. Exhibits include video and audio guides, viewing notes, and educational materials, and some of the artwork can be examined “at brushstroke level detail.”

### Smithsonian Online

The Smithsonian museums are world-renowned for their well-curated collections, and now their new multimedia experience brings some of them worldwide. The Museum of Natural History now has a panorama-style virtual tour that you can use to navigate halls and exhibits, zooming in to get a closer look at displays of particular interest. The MNH also has some specifically [online multimedia exhibits](#).

### Virtual Museum of Canada

The Virtual Museum of Canada is a project of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Through a partnership with Canadian museums, educational organizations, and private entities, the VMC offers “a unique space featuring over 600 virtual exhibits, nearly 1 million images, and a wealth of engaging multimedia content.” It's a fascinating way to explore the nation from the comfort of your home.





## AUSU UPDATE



### AU Students urge candidates to improve university funding

AU students are concerned about the financial health of Athabasca University and the effect of recent news stories on the reputation of the AUSU membership.

A recent CBC report notes that in recent years the university has made a series of reserve draws to cover budget shortfalls, draining the once \$30-million reserve fund.

Tuition and fees at AU, meanwhile, continue to increase despite the concerns of AUSU that education is becoming increasingly unaffordable in Alberta.

“I’m very concerned about AU’s financial situation,” says AUSU President Bethany Tynes. “AU is increasing student fees, observing hiring freezes, denying sabbaticals, delaying projects, and downsizing their offices due to a lack of available funds. We don’t want to see the quality of our education diminish.”

“At the same time,” Tynes continues, “I am confused by AU Board Chair Barry Walker’s comment to the CBC that AU is ‘in a very sound financial position,’ as the concerns we’ve noted do not support the notion that we’re financially sound.”

Chronic underfunding of public post-secondary education is a factor in AU’s financial stress. AU students have lobbied Alberta in recent years to address the shortfall; our members call on the candidates in Alberta’s provincial election to make post-secondary funding a priority in their platforms and to ensure that all Alberta universities are funded equally and sufficiently. Public post-secondary institutions need a reliable, predictable funding model that provides sufficient base operating funds to support a world-class education.

Athabasca University Students’ Union is the largest students’ union in Alberta, representing nearly 40,000 undergraduates annually.

#### Media Contact:

Tamra Ross, Executive Director, AUSU

1-800-788-9041 extension 2905

executivedirector@ausu.org

*This column is provided by AUSU to facilitate communication with its members. The Voice does not write or edit this section; all content has been exclusively and directly provided by AUSU, and any questions or comments about the material should be directed to [ausu@ausu.org](mailto:ausu@ausu.org).*

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# CLASSIFIEDS

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Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org) for more information.

## THE VOICE

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500 Energy Square - 10109 – 106 St NW - Edmonton AB - T5J 3L7  
- Ph: 800.788.9041 ext. 2905 - Fax: 780.497.7003 attn: Voice Editor

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**Editor-In-Chief** Tamra Ross  
**Managing Editor** Christina M. Frey

**Regular Columnists** Hazel Anaka, Katie D'Souza, S.D. Livingston, Wanda Waterman

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